

MAINSTREAMING YOUR PROGRAM: EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

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If it hasn't happened yet, it will. A student comes to you with a problem—say she's in a team-based class and her team members, who are all male, are monopolizing the lab equipment. You talk with the professor about equity issues in teaming. He or she is sympathetic but responds that “This isn't my job, that's what you are here for. My job is teaching.” What we have here is a failure to mainstream.

Why is Mainstreaming Important?

Mainstreaming a program is challenging. This is particularly true for programs that serve people who are not in the mainstream. Setting your program squarely in the mainstream is fundamental to success and is a much larger issue than attracting recognition and financial support. (Although it is an important component of being successful at both of those tasks.) The integration of your program into the fabric of your college or school is essential in order to achieve your program's goals and objectives.

Women in Engineering Programs are established, as separate entities, to address the challenges facing a specific group. Accordingly, the goal of any good WIE is to help your institution become more inclusive and productive for all of its members. Another important goal is to help the women they serve become highly functioning members of the larger engineering community. Our thesis is that in order to do that, the WIE programs must fit the same profile.

Mainstreaming and integration of WIE activities goes beyond functional organizational behavior; it models good behavior for our primary stakeholders—the students. The program administrators and staff must act like people who are fully integrated into the life of the college. The reverse of that is that we must act like people who are *not* marginalized. The overarching strategy must be to figure out what is needed and then to go about obtaining the resources through a well-thought out process—in other words, act like the professionals that we want our students to become.

This conduct has in mind faculty as well as students. Professional acumen, a style of collaboration, and demonstrated clarity of purpose are behaviors that model for junior faculty the very concepts that will help to guide them effectively through the pre-tenure period and beyond. Such comportment by you and your staff will serve as a model for women junior faculty. It also indicates to them that your office is a potential source of unspoken, but clear and strong support for their personal professional development.

What are the Challenges?

None of this is, of course, easy and the challenges are many. Your program isn't the only unit in your organization that is scrambling for respect, funding and participation. A unit founded to redress a specific situation, such as gender or racial inequity, is much more vulnerable than those more obviously aligned with the educational mission of your College or School. Accordingly, many of the challenges we face are subtle, and some are unfair.

The Pontius Pilate Syndrome: "WIE will take care of it." – This is a familiar refrain for any WIE director. And it continues: The College has founded, staffed and funded (and, many suspect, funded lavishly) your program to "take care" of the women in the College, so why should faculty expend their scarce time and resources worrying about how the women in their classes "feel?" Why should they try to solve a gender-related problem when there is an office especially for that? And what does all of this have to do with education anyway? The bottom line is that abdication of issues to WIE is easy for the busy, the unknowledgeable, and the unconcerned.

Don't let them wash their hands of it! Let people know that you are not the solver of all women's problems, but there to facilitate the way that your campus deals with issues relating to women and to aid in finding solutions. This is a shared responsibility. You were hired as a program director, not Wonder Woman with her golden, bullet repelling bracelets and magic lasso. Nor, like that feisty cartoon character Mighty Mouse, should your motto be, "Here I come to save the Day." It is tempting to respond to every request, especially at first. Sort out the requests by considering which address your mission and goals and with whom you can collaborate. Measure this against your available resources. And then undertake only those requests and activities in which you can succeed. This not only helps you gain respect; it protects your sanity.

Ignorance of gender issues—Many faculty and administrators still feel that women students or faculty face no special problems. Or, if they did, it's fixed! How many of us have talked with a faculty member who says she was never treated differently? Or the faculty member who assures us that there is no problem, because he has asked his women students and they, to a woman, declare that, "Everything is fine." The good news is that you have the ideal constituency for creative problem solving: engineers! Once you convince them that there is a problem, they are ready to help solve it. While you are winning them over remember that even those who are supportive or sympathetic may not be aware of gender issues or of the body of literature available. This includes women faculty. And lack of

support doesn't always translate as sexism. It is more likely that your faculty have just never thought about it. Remember that 94 percent of full time engineering faculty are men who have been educated in institutions with even higher percentages of men: Why would they have thought about women in engineering?

Backlash—The battle cry here is: “Why is there no Men in Engineering Program?” Faculty, parents, administrators, the general public, keep us on our toes with this question. Once we've suppressed the temptation to give our gut response to this, we can realize that it is a good opportunity to educate and is directly linked to keeping the campus informed about what is going on in WIE—and why. Resist, as well, the temptation to apologize. Women in Engineering Programs are established to try to bring more of a particular kind of person into your institution. Data and statistics are essential tools here. If the undergraduate male engineering populations of our institutions are already at 80 percent, what is the need for a Men in Engineering Program? Make sure that your various constituencies, and questioners, have the quantified information that justify your mission. Finally, speak to what the questioner can get out of your efforts. Building or supporting a WIE program is not an issue of altruism—and we can't expect people to think that way. Buy in occurs when the faculty, students, and administration understand what's in it for them. Is there additional funding because of WIE programs? Are companies more likely to recruit at diverse institutions? Are students better prepared for success in industry or academia because they have learned to work in diverse teams and to gain from the experience of students who have different life experiences and viewpoints from their own?

Respect—Aretha Franklin sings it best: “And all I'm asking is for a little respect.” Not a complaint, but a powerful statement coming from a woman who commands respect and does not wait for others to give it to her. This challenge is compounded by the fact that WIE programs are hybrid: academic, but not really. We support student achievement but do not offer the core courses that are the central purpose of why we're all here in the first place. In building respect for your program, remember that while your unit represents a core value, your institution can exist without it. (Unlike departments). To be effective and taken seriously, your programs' goals, objectives, and activities must have an impact on the academic aspects of the institution or unit. This does not make your program any less important—the academic mission of the institution happens, in part, because of what your office does. This may seem thankless, but it is important. Orson Wells said it best, “For he was not the hero, but the hero's best friend.” Influence can be as effective as power!

Key Strategy: Foster Institutional Ownership

The key strategy of every WIE should be to have the institutional gatekeepers identify with your success, and this means operating in full sight. Make sure that your internal stakeholders—the dean, faculty and peers—know what your mission is and how your activities support achieving that mission. A corollary is making sure that your mission serves the larger mission of your College and University.

Cultivate Backers—Visit key department heads and faculty and find out how they articulate their missions and activities and what their expectations are from you. Tell them what you are doing or planning to do and get their feedback and ideas for implementation. Ask them what their concerns are and what you can do to help them. Responding to their feedback is crucial. Follow up on the meetings, substantively, not as window dressing or as a token gesture. These contacts *will* have real results, whether you intend them or not. They can be negative (“all talk and no action”) or positive (“now I understand how this group benefits us”); your job is to make sure that the results are positive. Let them know what you have done as a result of your meeting or collaboration. If you can use their ideas, make sure you tell them and let other folks know, too. Continue the feed back by periodically soliciting their evaluation of particular ideas or activities. This is where real ownership of your program begins!

It is important to remember that these meetings and the subsequent follow up does not mean that others set your agenda nor that you do everything they ask. You are seeking consultation and collaboration—not assignments. Establish these expectations from the beginning. If a stakeholder suggests something that doesn’t fit your mission or your current programming, let them know. Take on only those things that fit your mission and available resources. (If resources are the problem, ask them to help out.) Collaboration or consensus doesn’t mean yielding, it means listening and integrating ideas and concerns. In the process, you will learn a lot about your institution, refine your own ideas and goals, and, ultimately, your program will be strengthened.

Identify Power Structures—Take stock of the organizational and political structure of your institution; few things are more important than understanding how your office fits into the institutional hierarchy. At the same time, begin identifying and differentiating the formal and informal power structures. At the formal level, make sure you have solid support from your dean and/or supervisor. If that support is lacking, your first job is to find out why and address whatever reservations she or he has. Recognizing the *informal* power structure is just as important. We all know the experience of having a good initiative blindsided by someone with no visible power. Identify these folks and make sure that they are informed and on board with your activity, or neutralized. In every institution, there are people who are your natural or convinced supporters, those who are against you and those who are indifferent. As you discover who these folks are, plan your interactions accordingly. Cultivate and reward your supporters; try to convince the indifferent over to your side; and learn how to live side by side with those who are not sympathetic.

Undertake Strategic Planning—Strategic planning serves two purposes: it helps you prioritize and plan and it solidifies your credentials as a serious operation. Getting input from your stakeholders is a defined part of this process—their ideas, input, and support help to develop a relevant and attainable menu of mission, vision, and goals. Developing and adhering to a strong mission statement, based on that of your institution, is an essential first step in strategic planning and in mainstreaming your program.

Be Image Conscious: Look Like a Going Concern! – Image and performance are important in achieving your mission and creating an organization that others want to take credit for or identify with. The how tos here are straight forward: produce professional output and make sure that your office is well organized and looks like a successful enterprise. Your constituents—faculty, administrators, industry representatives, alumnae and alumni, and students—are more likely to take you seriously if you take yourself seriously as a professional organization. Students are a fundamental part of this equation: WIE staff and programming are modeling professional behavior for them.

A Word to the Wise: “Let ‘em see you sweat,” as our friend Priscilla Guthrie, an executive at TRW says. Because you labor out of love, and commitment, to others your work and success may seem effortless. Don’t let them be fooled for long. When they don’t see you sweat, they don’t appreciate all that you do. You get more respect by letting them see your process—and make it easier to make a case for increased support.

Cultivate External partnerships—Find out what your external stakeholders—parents, alumnae/i, industry, other WIE programs—want and integrate it into your message, then leverage that interaction. One of the reasons that WIE Programs exist is that industry wants a more diverse workforce and is willing to provide soft funding at the university level to achieve it. Leveraging is not a tool to use to set up pressure or an adversarial situation. Your stakeholders are bona fide partners. What you leverage is professional relationships that further the mission of the institution. These relationships exemplify the fact that other professionals take your program seriously and encourage others to take notice. Demonstrated interest and investment by these folks, raises your capital in the institution. An external advisory board is a good way to institutionalize external partnerships. It can provide valuable programmatic advice, provide positive interactions for students, increase visibility for your program, improve your program’s status within your own organization, and increase recognition of your efforts. It can also be a significant partner in obtaining external funding and providing more support that you can leverage. Caution: undertake this only after careful planning and with the backing of your dean. A successful advisory board takes a great deal of up front planning, time, institutional involvement, and resources.

Mainstream Gender and Equity Issues—Keeping the community informed is a key building block in structuring a program. You cultivate a constituency at the same time that you provide a valuable commodity—information—*and* ignite in people’s minds how they can get involve or seed thinking for future collaborations and support.

- ◆ Stay current with what’s going on in the rest of the country and in your institution
- ◆ Share that information with a list of key contacts
- ◆ Send periodic communications (updates, newsletter, etc.) to faculty and administrators providing good, useable statistics on graduation rates, enrollment, faculty profiles, etc.
- ◆ Maintain an information bulletin board in a prominent place

Throughout, foster the notion that these are shared problems, with solutions growing out of concerted effort and mutual benefits. Avoid adversarial positioning: polarizing the topic

will not further your mission, the respect you command, or your credibility. Take the time to try to understand where critics are coming from—ask your critic to, “Help me understand what you are trying to say.” The result can be greater understanding of the issues, and how they can best be presented, for everyone.

Seek Out Internal Partnerships—Develop key liaisons and partners within your institution. You gain respect of others when you allow them to participate in the formulation of programming and the implementation of solutions. A Faculty Advisory Committee can help get out the message on equity issues, your program goals and successes and their relevancy to faculty needs and interests. It can also provide a great reality check for your programming. Identify programs outside of your college that have similar missions and/or activities and establish contact with key folks. They can become your collaborators and mentors. In return, show meaningful support for their efforts and let them know that you value their support for yours. This doesn’t mean that you have to set up a series of lunch dates that stretch to the millenium; there are many substantive ways to stay in contact that leave you time to run your program. Add them to that newsletter or information list you establish, or send along relevant clippings, articles or email information. Make continued contact informational, a reminder that you are there and share a similar mission. Once again you are modeling behavior—networking, collaborating and leveraging resources to achieve your mission. And letting Mighty Mouse be the one who saves the day.

Leverage existing activities and facilities—If there are college or departmental meeting places available, schedule them for your events and, when appropriate, invite faculty or administrators to participate or drop by. Use institutional computer labs for your workshops and classes. When you know that Department X is considering an event relevant to your mission, offer to co-sponsor with mailing lists, money, or administrative time. There is real benefit in using other resources, even when it is a necessity. The pay off is that faculty and administrators will know what your program is doing and begin to develop that sense of ownership. It integrates your program into the life of the college and allows you to infuse equity components into other units in an effective way.

Funding: Is There Ever Enough? —The short answer is, of course, “No.” Most WIE Programs are in institutions where all units are supported to a large degree by soft funding. Take away the research dollars from most departments and there would be a major implosion. Soft funding is an integral part of the systems in which we live and work and there is no reason why WIEs should be different. Explore the positives of soft funding. WIEs are by nature service and support organizations. They *should* be accountable to their clients. They *should* constantly review and innovate activities. Having to justify programming and satisfy customers inspires you to innovate and to stay in touch with the needs of your stakeholders. It also puts you on a professional footing with your funders. But continue to seek out funding opportunities. If you are a new organization, it will take some time to develop reliable funding streams. While you are laying the groundwork, explore internal funding streams. If you are underfunded, make the case to your dean or supervisor with empirical evidence and a thorough, documented plan. Submit formal

proposals for specific programs to your dean or departments heads for seed funding. Also, check out internal granting units: Many institutions offer seed funding through a variety of units or offices (EEO, Undergraduate Programs, etc.). When you are successful, follow up with reports of how you used the funding and the results it helped to bring about.

Concluding Watchword: Integration!

In the end, mainstreaming is another word for integration. As you start out and as your success grows, know that everything is connected in some way. By working to create ownership of your program and to foster partnerships, you integrate WIE activities into the life of the institution. It's like adding another fiber to the rope that ties everything together and then anchors it to a firm and stable base. The benefits are worth the effort: we work with, rather than against the institutional hierarchy and we model functional and effective professional behavior for the women we serve.

MOVING BEYOND INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMS TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

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